

Fialkova, Larisa and Maria Yelenevskaya. *In Search of the Self: Reconciling the Past and Present in Immigrants' Experience*. Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press. 2013. Bibliography. 282 pages. ISBN 978-9949-490-80-6

With this book Fialkova and Yelenevskaya add yet another entry to their continued study of how émigrés from the former Soviet Union make sense of their lives in new surroundings. As in their other books, the authors use the interviews that they conducted with project participants and online discussion forums where Russian-speaking newcomers share experiences and advice. In the last two chapters of the book they add a new dimension and work primarily with published sources. One of these chapters discusses literary works written by émigrés while the other analyzes jokes and cartoons printed in newspapers and circulated online.

The authors begin by giving a history of their collaborative efforts, describing how they met and how they became a team. They also speak briefly about their methodology and about studies of the immigrant experience written by other scholars. This introduction is followed by a chapter on place. Here we learn the history of immigrant settlement in Israel. We read the immigrants' own accounts of progressively improved living conditions: they describe how they started with very modest quarters and gradually became homeowners and landlords. As in other studies by these two authors, most of the chapter is devoted to quotations. Respondents discuss their preferences, with the young typically wanting to live in large cities, while families gravitate toward smaller towns. Fialkova and Yelenevskaya's interviewees talk of their perceptions of various types of neighbors, both Israeli and Arabic. They complain about lack of transportation and Jewish restrictions on holy day travel. Some cities that might otherwise be attractive are made less so by their proximity to the border and the accompanying potential for missile strikes and the authors' sources discuss the fears of people living in such cities and their ways of coping.

The chapter on legal anthropology is my favorite. Fialkova and Yelenevskaya do their typical descriptions of people dealing with unfamiliar systems and approaches to life and provide ample quotations where new immigrants describe their experience with Israeli courts. But they also add the extra dimension of describing and analyzing ideas of justice that Jews arriving from the former Soviet Union developed in their earlier country of residence. As the authors explain, in the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union, there was the law, meaning the formal legal system that no one really respected or trusted, and there was also justice, a kind of moral given which all good people were expected to recognize and uphold. It is the desire for justice that drives many of the people whose stories are quoted in this book and they tell of pursuing litigation to achieve justice, even at great personal cost. Needless to say, sometimes their efforts are successful and sometimes not. But in many instances their dealings with the Israeli legal system are complicated by expectations of certain behaviors from fellow post-Soviet immigrants, expectations that are not always met.

Holidays are the subject of the next chapter. Immigrants have mixed feelings. They are delighted that the Jewish holidays, which had to be marked surreptitiously in the Soviet world, can be celebrated openly in Israel. Yet many miss holidays that were important in their former homeland but are not part of Israeli culture. These include the celebration of New Years, the Soviet, non-religious version of Christmas, and holidays of historical importance, such as Victory Day, marking the end of the Second World War. Some newcomers turn to alternative rituals, and this chapter has a section on a New Age group that had been popular in Russia. Called the followers of Simoron, this group struggles to attract a following on Israeli soil.

Chapter Four deals with a topic that is new to the authors. Fialkova, writing alone, looks

at literary works written by Russian Jews who emigrated to Germany rather than to Israel. If constructing a new identity is difficult for people who move from the former Soviet Union to Israel, it is doubly so for those who chose to move to Germany because of the Second World War and the Holocaust. While it seems that the desire to leave Russia or other post-Soviet states takes precedence over avoidance of a country with an anti-Semitic past, coming to terms with this desire does require artistic exploration. Many ex-Soviet authors chose to chronicle these explorations by writing in German, thus emphasizing their acceptance of a German identity.

Chapter Five is also a single-author effort. Here Yelenevskaya looks at the humor of Israelis who emigrated from Russia. Jokes, many dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, draw on anti-Arabic sentiment developed prior to immigration to Israel. They also often use existing Russian jokes or offer a word play on familiar Russian phrases. The jokes, like so many other folk expressions, are ambivalent and target Israel as well as its enemies.

Fialkova and Yelenevskaya's book is another worthy contribution to the important work on diasporas that the authors have already published. With the movement of peoples, not just from Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union to Israel, but across the globe, studies such as this are crucial to understanding the current human situation. While all of the material here is good and important, some chapters are better than others. As already noted, I especially liked the chapter on negotiating one's way through the legal system and dealing with firmly held concepts of justice. I found the final two chapters the least satisfying. I do not know if I have developed a taste for the style of the two authors when they write jointly and miss that style when each writes alone. Perhaps these chapters are less to my liking because they do not have the rich personal data that comes with extensive quotations from persons interviewed by the authors. Fialkova argues that using literature lets the author speak for him or herself and avoids the power dynamic that is found when an interviewer guides the course of the discussion. This may be true, but I do miss the voices of the respondents when they speak spontaneously rather than through polished literary works. These slight personal quibbles with the approach of this book aside, I do highly recommend the volume under review. It explores new topics and it provides the reader with an update on the lives of émigrés from the former Soviet world. As immigrants change their place of residence over time (the topic of the first chapter in this book), so their attitudes and concerns also change. Immigration is not a static phenomenon that can be captured in one study and this book is a welcome update that gives us a glimpse into the current life of Russian Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

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